

## This Is Season For Careful Planning In Shortgrass Country

By Monte Noelke

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MERTZON — The arrival of winter always finds the native Shortgrasser in a planning humor. Strategy drawn in late October has to be altered to fit November. Well planned late-autumn stocking rations have to be changed to meet each new development.

Like all of ranchdom, our long range plans normally cover about 72 hours. Short-term programming can be marked down to about half a day. However, during times of extreme stress we are forced to operate without knowing from one hour to the next what course we'll take.

Several different methods are used out here to program to the future, but there are most widely used:

1. "The old Indian leaky canoe theory." This comes from an idea that was passed on by tribal wise men to the pioneers. It is based on the irrevocable truth that a man cannot paddle upstream as long as he is barely able to bale water from his canoe fast enough to stay afloat. Projected into modern times, the leaky canoe conception works best around the banking houses when eyes of the purse keepers grow more steely as the ranchers' feed bills grow bigger. Superficially, this appears to disclaim that a stockman can plan ahead; yet when people's hearts are heavy as a wine tester's breath, it is indeed a mighty popular idea.

2. "Determining the amount of replacement stock to hold over during the winter." Any rancher with a mite of gumption can foretell how many ewe lambs and heifer calves to keep for next year. The problem is simply to have the necessary factors present before attempting to settle the matter. If the ranchman for example, has in-laws with winter pasturage, he needn't waste a minute trying to figure out how much stock to keep. Also, ranches backed by oil and gas wells shouldn't bother about keeping over a few hundred here or a few thousand there. Without in-laws who are farmers, or with no oil wells, the problem can be a stickler. But actually it really doesn't make too much difference because the way things are going, it looks as though hombres who don't have rich kinfolks or oil production aren't going to be raising enough heifers and lambs to matter anyway.

3. "The listening to the forecast approach." Many successful ranchers rely on market and weather experts to plan their business. These growers study graphs and charts that show everything from 90-day cloud formation prophecies to the amount of cup grease being used by feed mills. Reports from Midwest are balanced against variations of taste in the chop houses of London. Overall pictures of the agricultural scene are superseded by near X-ray versions of what is to come off next year. Though this approach has many critics, it is still the best distraction known to the industry to keep a man's mid off the multitude of unforeseeable calamities he knows will strike sooner or later. And without the throngs of educated guessers, we wouldn't know 3.2 percent of the time what was going to hit us next, or what was going to send us plummeting upward to the break-even line.

From now until April or May, mislaid plans and heart-breaking miscalculations will be the order of our days. That's all you'll hear around our coffee houses. But come the blessed spring we'll all be ready once more to tackle whatever fate has in store for us.